

15-27 N. Main St. (Commercial Buildings)
Seefluth Building
19-21 N. Main St.
Oshkosh
Winnebago County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-287 B

HABS
WIS
70-004,
3B-

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
15-27 N. MAIN ST. (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)
SEEFLUTH BUILDING

HABS No. WI-287 B

Location: 19,21 North Main Street, Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Present Owner: City of Oshkosh

Present Occupant: William R. Seefluth

Present Use: Used by the previous owner, William R. Seefluth as a paint store.

Significance: A unique example of the Romanesque Revival applied to a small scale commercial structure. The only surviving example of Romanesque Revival in the city. Double peaks mark the individual stores, elaborate corbel tables follow the pitch of the gable. A group of three pointed arch windows occurs in each bay, with the stair location marked by a narrow double window. The building is a possible survivor of the fire of 1875.

The double storefront was originally owned by C.S. Weaton on the north and by Gabriel Bouck and Charles A. Weisbrod on the south. Of the three, Bouck was significant to the history of the city. He was a prominent lawyer who was a member of the State Assembly (1860-62; 1873-75) and Speaker of that body (1874-5), State Attorney General (1857-59), and Member of Congress (1876-78). He also raised the first body of volunteers and led them during the Civil War. When discharged in 1864, Bouck had achieved the rank of colonel. Colonel Bouck died in Oshkosh in 1904.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Circa 1875. In December of 1980, the City of Oshkosh received the following history regarding the "Seefluth's Building" from the Howard Needles Tammen and Bergendoff consulting firm.

We have not been able to determine the exact age of the building. Although a plaque on the north storefront seems to read "C. S. Weston-1878," the last digit is not entirely readable and could conceivably be either a "5" or a "3." The south parcel was acquired by Gabriel Bouck and Charles A. Weisbrod on April 4, 1871. Cornelius S. Weston bought the north parcel the same day. Although

a single building covers both parcels, each storefront was treated as an individual property until the mid-1960's when the current owners broke through the center wall to use both ground floor storefronts.

Bouck and Weisbrod and his heirs owned the south half of the building until 1907. From 1884 to 1891, this was rented by William Havemann for a restaurant and bakery. It then had several uses until it was purchased by the present owner. Gabriel Bouck was a prominent local lawyer who led the first company of Oshkosh volunteers in the Civil War; however, he had business interests throughout the City and this property does not seem to have been an important part of his life. The only mortgage of record with the Register of Deeds was that taken at the time of the original purchase. That is also the only time there is any obvious connection between the owners of the two parcels until they are consolidated under Mr. Seefluth. This does not, however, mean the building had to be built at that time.

Mr. Weston has a record of several mortgages in addition to that taken for the original purchase. Most notably were two made in November of 1873 totaling \$1,900. Both had a length of two years. At the end of that time Weston entered into another mortgage for \$1,500, presumably to pay off the first loan. This latter transaction required Mr. Weston to obtain insurance on the building on the property for the amount of the mortgage; a clause which was not part of his earlier transactions. This would indicate a structure on the site at that time which may have been the existing building.

Thus, we know the building was no later than 1878 due to the plaque and may have been as early as 1871. If the evidence from the Register of Deeds files is accurate, the mortgages of 1873 may have raised construction capital. We feel comfortable in dating the building between 1873 and 1878, and thus, identifying it as another possible survivor of the fire of 1875.

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Register of Deeds, Winnebago County Courthouse, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

The double storefront building remained under individual ownerships until consolidated by William R. Seefluth in 1964.

Chain of Title, Southern one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) of Seefluth's Building;

- 1871 Deed, April 4, 1971, recorded in Volume 48, page 531, Benjamin F. Moore, original subdivider of the land on which the building stands, to Gabriel Bouck and Charles A. Weisbrod.
- 1884 Deed, February 20, 1884, recorded in Volume 124, page 325, Charles A Weisbrod, $\frac{1}{2}$ interest in building to Eliza Weisbrod.
- 1898 Deed, July 13, 1898, recorded in Volume 164, page 373, Eliza Weisbrod, $\frac{1}{2}$ interest to Anna A. Weisbrod.
- 1907 Deed, July 2, 1907, recorded in Volume 265, page 128, Gabriel Bouck estate to H.C. Nielsen and Henry Nielsen, $\frac{1}{2}$ interest in building.
- 1907 Deed, June 18, 1907, recorded in Volume 268, page 311, Anna Weisbrod McIntyre, $\frac{1}{2}$ interest to H.C. Nielsen and Henry Nielsen.
- 1907 Mortgage, July 2, 1907, recorded in Volume 269, page 143, H.C. Nielsen, his wife Caroline Neilsen and Henry Nielsen to Charles Rahr, Sr.
- 1911 Assignment of Mortgage, February 23, 1911, recorded in Volume 269, page 143, Charles Rahr, Sr. to Charles Rahr Junior.
- 1912 Sheriff's Deed, May 4, 1912, recorded in volume 235, page 483, foreclosure on Henry Neilsen, Caroline Nielsen and estate of H. C. Neilsen to Charles Rahr, Jr.
- 1926 Estate of Charles Rahr, Jr., May 10, 1926 in probate No. 422, May 10, 1926, Charles Rahr, Jr to Carl Rahr, Blanche Rahr and Lucille Rahr Scovile.
- 1964 Deed, November 30, 1964, recorded in volume 1094, page 271, document #329930, Carl T. Rahr and Edna V. Rahr, his wife, Blanche N. Rahr and Lucille Rahr Scovil to William R. Seefluth.

- 1981 Deed, July 22, 1981 recorded as document #56629, William R. Seefluth to City of Oshkosh.

Chain of Title, Northern one-half (½) of Seefluth's building;

- 1871 Deed, April 4, 1871, recored in Volume 48, page 545, Benjamin F. Moore, original subdivider of the land on which the building stands to C. S. Weston.
- 1882 Sheriff's Deed, July 17, 1882, recorded in Volume 125, page 474, foreclosure on C.S. Weston and his wife Philena M. Weston to Ebenezer Hubbard.
- 1889 Deed, September 17, 1889, recorded in Volume 162, page 499, Mary Hubbard, wife of deceased Ebenezer Hubbard, to Martha Jane (Hubbard) Johnston.
- 1891 Deed, June 9, 1891, recorded in Volume 181, page 32, Martha Jane Johnston to Agnes Reeve.
- 1895 Deed, June 20, 1895, recorded in Volume 205, page 554, Agnes Reeve to George K. Reeve.
- 1914 Deed, January 29, 1914, recorded in Volume 284, page 584, George B. Simmons, general guardian of Lucas T. Reeve, infact heir of George K. Reeve to Charles Bantin.
- 1922 Deed, December 18, 1922, recorded in Volume 366 page 94, Charles Bantin and his wife Theresa Bantin to John P. Heinz.
- 1937 Judgement, March 16, 1937, recorded in Volume 465, page 395, John P. Heinz estate to Louis B. Heinz and his wife Mathilda A. Heinz.
- 1948 Deed, October 21, 1948, recorded in Volume 592, page 603, document #159551, Louis B. Heinz and his wife Mathilda A. Heinz to Robert W. Seeflut and his wife Mayme C. Seefluth.
- 1966 Deed, May 18, 1966, recorded in Volume 1142, page 329, document #347149, Robert W. Seefluth and Anna M. Seefluth, his wife, to William R. Seefluth.
- 1981 Deed, July 22, 1981, recorded as document #566299, William R. Seefluth to City of Oshkosh

5. Original plans and construction: Unknown
 6. Alterations and additions: A building permit was taken out on July 25, 1955 to close off leaded glass sections in the storefronts.
- B. Historical Context: Several aspects of the "Seefluth's Building" provide interesting insights to the history of the City of Oshkosh. The building could quite possibly be a survivor of the fire of 1875. The area of destruction caused by the fire was over one mile long and over a quarter mile wide. Several hundred buildings including most of the business district and approximately 300 homes were destroyed.

One of the original owners of the south $\frac{1}{2}$ of the "Seefluth's Building" was Gabriel Bouck. Bouck, along with Weisbrod and his heirs owned the south $\frac{1}{2}$ of the building until 1907. From 1884 to 1891 this was rented by William Havemann for a restaurant and a bakery. A history of Gabriel Bouck and his fine record in Wisconsin politics follows:

Colonel Gabriel Bouck (1828-1904)

Colonel Bouck was a prominent Oshkosh lawyer who served as a member and, later speaker of the State Assembly, Attorney-General for the State, and Congressman. He was also the leader of the first group of Oshkosh Volunteers in the Civil War.

Gabriel Bouck was born in Fultonham, New York on December 16, 1828, the son of New York Governor, W.C. Bouck. He was educated in private academies and graduated from Union College in New York City in 1847. Following graduation, he studied law, first in Binghamton, New York and then, in 1848, in Milwaukee. He moved to Oshkosh in 1849 and opened a practice in general law which he maintained until his death in 1904.

As his law practice prospered, Bouck became more and more interested in politics. He was elected State Attorney-General in 1857 as the Democrats recaptured the Governorship following the term of Coles Bashford. In 1859 he returned to Oshkosh only to be elected to the Assembly in 1860. The advent of the Civil War ousted the Democrats from office for the next decade. In 1864, Democrat Bouck ran for Congress against Philetus Sawyer. A heated campaign ensued with Bouck portrayed as the Well-educated, intelligent, war hero against Sawyer who was characterized as a semi-literate robber baron. Sawyer was elected and served for the next ten years.

In 1873 Bouck was re-elected to the Assembly, becoming speaker of that body for the 1874 session. In 1876 he was finally elected to Congress, Sawyer having relinquished his seat in 1875. He was however, defeated for

re-election in 1878.

In April 1861, Bouck raised the first company of volunteers from Oshkosh for the Civil War of which he was made captain. In 1862 he was transferred to another regiment as colonel. He fought through the 1864 campaign before being honorably discharged. Colonel Bouck was present at the Battle of Bull Run, the siege of Corinth, and several other campaigns including the battles of Vicksburg and Missionary Ridge.

Colonel Bouck died in Oshkosh in 1904. He never owned a home in the city, living instead at the Seymour and, later, Athearn Hotels.

In 1907 the south $\frac{1}{2}$ of the "Seefluth's Building" was acquired by Charles Rahr. Rahr was the founder (along with his brother August) of the City Brewery in 1865. In 1884 the brewery name was changed to the Charles Rahr Brewing Company. The brewery remained a small family owned business until it closed in the early 1960's. The south $\frac{1}{2}$ of the "Seefluth Building" was used for many years as a retail outlet for the family operated brewery.

The north $\frac{1}{2}$ of the "Seefluth's Building" bears no notable ties to prominent local citizens. It has been used as a paint and wallpaper store for over 40 years.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Building facade is dominated by paired gables topped by lintels. The building is an example of the Romanesque Revival style with corbeled brick work following the eave line which is accented by a pattern of raised brick. Although the first floor has been significantly altered, the windows on the second floor have retained most of their integrity. They appear in groups and the slightly pointed arch of the windows are outlined by hood moldings.
2. Condition of fabric: The consulting firm of Howard Needles Tammen and Bergendorf employed by the City of Oshkosh has determined the exterior of the "Seefluth's Building" to be in fair condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two-story solid brick wall building with separate store fronts. The north segment is 20'x 80' with 1,600 square foot area. The south segment is also 20'x80' with 1,600 square foot area.

The furnace room has concrete floor, plaster walls and ceiling, a metal covered wood entry door, a Mueller Climatrol gas furnace, a 30-gallon gas water heater, a ceiling light bulb, two fuse boxes, a 100 ampere electric service.

There is a door opening in the north wall of the south building with a ramp down 4 inches to the floor of the north building.

The rest of the floor area of the south building is open sales area with vinyl and carpet floor about 18 years old over wood floor on wood floor joists over a shallow crawl space. The walls are either peg board panel or wood panel over old plaster. Ceiling height is 12 feet.

The south building's second floor has a hall the length of the building with wood stairs at the front and the fire escape door at the rear. The second floor is in poor condition with old maple floors, plaster walls and ceilings, a 4' x 14" skylight, a scuttle to the roof in the hall, minimum lighting with 4 fluorescent 4 foot two-tube factory fixtures. The roof is in good condition and is asphalt built up redone in 1979. The floor was redone in 1972 with a steel beam down the center and old joists replaced where needed.

2. North Building: The north building has the front 43 feet sales and display area, the rear 37 feet for counter, storage, furnace room toilet room. The front has plaster walls painted, peg board panels, spotlights and fluorescent lights. The ceiling is drywall painted. The floor is vinyl. The furnace room is at the northwest corner of the building with concrete floor, Mueller Climatrol gas-fired furnace, drop cord light, plaster walls and ceiling. A toilet room is east of the furnace room with it's west wall open to the furnace room with old toilet and lavatory.

The storage area at the west end of the building has wood floor, plaster walls and ceiling.

There is a wood plank stairs 3' wide leading up to a 16 foot by 20 foot mezzanine area with fir floor, 6' height celotex ceiling, plaster walls, fluorescent lights.

There is a wood plank stairs up from the mezzanine to the second floor.

The second floor is divided into 4 rooms. The floors are 6" pine or plywood. The walls are celotex panel or plaster. The ceilings are plaster with broken and cracked areas. Lighting is minimum by 8 foot two-tube exposed fluorescent fixture.

2. Foundations: No basement, stone foundation.
3. Walls: Solid Brick
4. Structural system, framing: Wood floor joists over a shallow crawl space. Wood frame joists support the second floor. The second floor of the south building was redone in 1972 with a steel support beam down the center added. The first floor of the north building is uneven due to sagging floor joists.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There is a wood entry door in the center of the front leading to a stairs to the second floor of the buildings. The rear of the buildings has an entry door to each building on the first floor and an entry door to the second floor hall reached by a steel fire escape, stairs and landing.

Each of the building fronts have a recessed entry way to the stores and a recessed entryway to the second floor stairs with the doors set back 6 feet with concrete floor 6" above the public walk, plaster ceilings or plywood with wood panel walls for second floor entryway.

- b. Windows and shutters: Both buildings have store display fronts with plate glass windows set in copper with aluminum and glass entry doors. There are 8 windows in the rear wall of the buildings that have been boarded up on the outside walls.

6. Roof: Peaked with wood frame, wood deck, and built up asphalt.

C. Description of Interior (see attached floor plan):

1. South Building: The south building was a tavern with rooms above. The first floor has a Men's toilet room at the northwest corner with ceramic tile floor, 6" ceramic tile base, plaster walls and ceiling, a toilet in a wood enclosure, a wall-hung lavatory, an old floor urinal, single light bulb in ceiling. This toilet room is not in use.

The Women's toilet room at the southwest corner is similar to the Men's but has two compartments with a toilet in one and a wall-hung lavatory in the other.

There are 3 wood panel doors in the second floor south wall opening into the hall serving the south building's second floor.

The roof has been redone on the west 40 feet of the building in 1979.

The condition of the first floor is fair. The toilet room does not meet code.

The condition of the second floor is fair to poor and used only for limited storage.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The site has 40 feet frontage on North Main Street with 100 foot depth for a total 4000 square feet area. The 3200 square foot building is located with the front facing east. The west 20 feet of the site provides an 800 square foot parking lot.

Main Street in front of the building is an 80 foot width street, asphalt paved, curb and gutter, 10-foot width public sidewalk. There is a concrete divider strip down the center of the street.

2. Historic landscape design: The neighborhood is a downtown commercial area bounded by the Fox River on the south, Waugoo Avenue on the north, Court Street on the east and Jackson Street on the west.

It is an old area with new uses over the past ten years, namely, the Park Plaza Mall, three new banks, Hooper Community Center, Engler Law Office, Oshkosh Fire Department, Post Office and Internal Revenue Service Office.

The uses vary from a machine shop, to a real estate office with a dry cleaner's, a body building gym, 3 taverns, a paint store, an old furniture store, a print shop, a vacant warehouse, a wholesale electrical company, parking lot and small city park.

The older buildings have generally outlived their commercial economic life with two of them vacant and beyond repair.

The "Seefluth's Building" is the most significant building lying on the west side of North Main Street in the block immediately north of the Fox River. The buildings that form this streetscape are a collection of late 19th-century and early 20th-century commercial architecture in period styles including Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Commercial Style.

The diversely articulated cornice line of the 2 and 3-story brick buildings create a sense of time, place and development.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Information sources used:
- City of Oshkosh tax assessment records
 - City of Oshkosh building permit records
 - City of Oshkosh City Directories
 - Winnebago County Register of Deeds files
 - Appraisals of the property done by Fox Valley Appraisals, Inc. and by Barnard and Allworden Company.

Intensive Historic Research Survey completed for the City of Oshkosh by the Howard Needles Tammen and Bergendoff consulting firm.

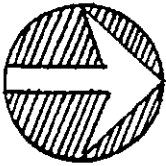
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The block in which the "Seefluth's Building" lies is part of a redevelopment project that will utilize Community Development Block Grant funds. The entire project entails the purchase of 16 parcels of land, relocating the businesses clearing the land, and utilizing the site to develop a hotel/conference center that will be known as the Oshkosh Centre.

The buildings located at 15, 19-21, 23, 25, and 27 North Main that lie in the redevelopment area have been determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as an Historic District. The City of Oshkosh feels that the old, dilapidated buildings in the area create a severe blighting influence in the focal point of the business district, and that clearance for new development is the only viable alternative.

Prepared by: Phil Rosenquist
Associate Planner
City of Oshkosh
December 9, 1981

15-27 N. Main St. (Comm'l Bldgs)
Seefluth Building
HABS No. WI-287B (page 11)



1" = 8'

